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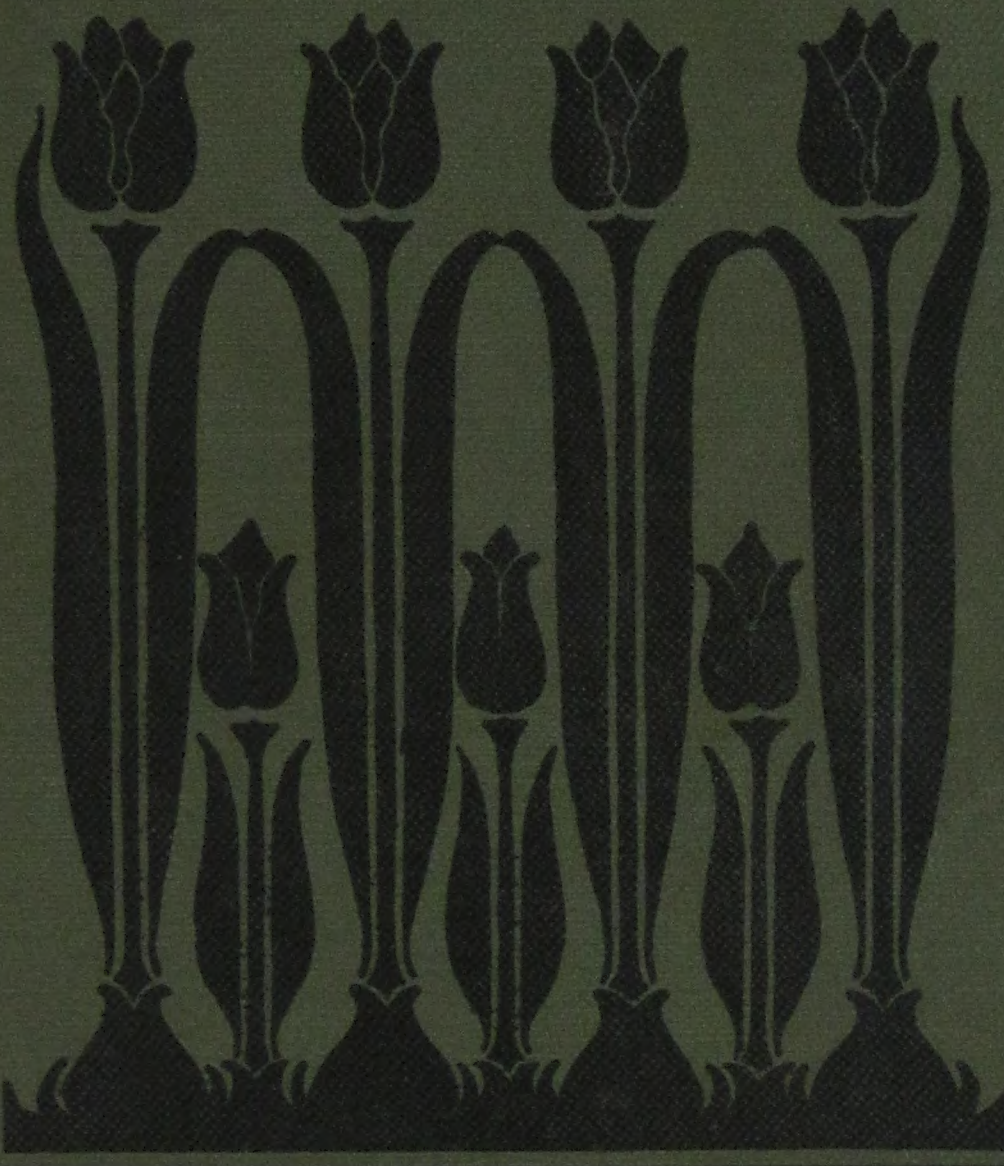
CHILDREN OF THE NORTHLAND

BY BERTHA E. BUSH



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INSTRUCTOR LITERATURE SERIES

Children of the Northland

BY

Bertha E. Bush

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Children of the Northland

AN ESKIMO HOUSE

Little Kodlu's father was building a new house. When we hear this, we think of carpenters working and hammers pounding all day, and piles of lumber and brick and and sand heaped up. But not one of these things were to be seen around the new house that Kodlu's father was building.

"How can you build a house without lumber or brick or stone to build it with?" an

American boy would certainly have asked, looking around wonderingly at the white desolate plain where no tree ever grew and not even a bush was seen.

"What would we do with lumber and brick and stone?" little Kodlu would ask back in puzzled fashion when the white boy had explained what he meant by them. "I am sure they are not half so good to build houses here with as blocks of snow are."

And he would be quite right. There is no material in Eskimo land so useful for house-building as the snow that lies all about.

There were no carpenters needed. Kodlu's father, Onadluk and his uncle Tallook with little Kodlu to chink up the cracks could build the whole thing in less than two hours.

They cut the hard snow into blocks with the snow-knives that they carried in their belts. They pried them out with the short-handled snow-shovel. Then they laid the blocks in a big circle. On top of this they put another layer of snow blocks, reaching a little farther inward, and so on until a round white dome was made. These white dome-like houses are called igloos and are the warmest and coziest houses that could be made in Eskimo land.

Kodlu didn't have much to do at first since he had no snow-knife. He played with the dogs and watched that the snow-shovel should not get covered up with the falling snow when it was laid down.

That snow-shovel was very precious—but we would have called it a very funny looking shovel. The lower part was made of wood—pieces of wreck that had been thrown up on the shore by the waves. They were fastened together by reindeer sinews, and there was a short handle made of a curved piece of musk-ox horn. The inner edge, which would soon have worn off, was protected by a tip made from the toughest part of a reindeer's horn. Some of the Eskimos, who could not get any drift-wood, made their snow-shovels of the tips of reindeers' horns fastened together by thongs. The snow-shovel and snow-knife were carried with them wherever they traveled; and with these two implements the Eskimo was always able to make a house for himself no matter where he might be. In the summer, when a good deal of the snow melted they lived in tents of skins, but they did not compare in comfort with the snow igloos.

"Come, Kodlu, it is time for you to do your work," called his father, and Kodlu came running up through the falling snow.

His cheeks were as round and red as the apples he had never seen. His hair was black and straight, and his face was dark too for he had never washed it. How could they wash when there wasn't any water unless they melted it over the lamp. His nose was flat and his cheek-bones high, and he was so round and fat that he looked like a waddling ball of fur; but his eyes were very bright and he knew more about building snow houses than American boys do.

His work was to chink up all the cracks in the house with handfuls of snow. Very skilful were his fur-mittened hands at such work; and when the house grew so high that he had to climb right up on top of it to reach the spaces between the blocks, he looked like a fat brown spider clambering up over the whiteness—or maybe more like a bee on a bee-hive, for the snow igloo was shaped exactly like the old-fashioned round bee-hives.

When the house was done, Onadluk cut a hole in the side for a door. A very tiny door it was, just big enough to let a man crawl through on his hands and knees. Kodlu had never seen a door so high that he could walk through it. Over this door they built a smaller igloo to keep the wind out. This was their front hall.

When the house was finished, they shoveled loose snow over it to make it still more snug and warm. They didn't have much furniture to move in. No tables, no chairs, no bureaus or cupboards. The bed they built up right inside of it, of snow. It was so big that it took up the larger part of the room in the igloo. Over it they spread ever so many furs and skins, and there the babies rolled all day and the grown folks sat as happy as could be. Almost the only thing besides these furs and skins to move in was the lamp. It was made from a big stone hollowed out, and looked a little like a great clam shell. They burned seal oil in it, and the wick was made of moss. This lamp was quite enough to keep the igloo comfortably warm, for the thick snow walls kept out all the outside cold. Sometimes it grew too warm and the people inside took off almost all their clothes as if it had been a hot summer day. Indeed the little children who stayed in the igloo wore no clothes at all, and no one thought of their being cold.

Sometimes the igloo became so warm that the snow roof began to melt. Then the father or mother scooped up a snowball from the floor and stuck it against the point where the water was dripping. It stuck fast

and soaked up the water like a sponge; but when it got full of water it would fall down.

Little Kodlu was rather tired when he came in from his house-building and it was pleasant to curl up on the warm furs of the bed and lie and dream with his face to the white dome that made the ceiling.

"How could anybody ask for a nicer house than this?" thought little Kodlu dreamily. Just then the snowball his mother had stuck up on the ceiling above his head became soaked full of water and loosened. Spat! it came down right in Kodlu's face, flattening into a slushy pancake against his snub nose and round cheeks.

"Ugh! Poof!" cried little Kodlu starting up quite cross. But the bear's meat that was boiling over the lamp smelled good and he was hungry. Besides this his mother had a great treat for him in the shape of some chunks of bear's tallow which he liked better than you like candy. So he got over his crossness and sat in the circle around the pot, tearing off pieces of meat with his fingers and cramming them into his mouth. as happy as could be.

"How could any people be more fortunate than the Eskimo," said little Kodlu; and the rest of the family nodded their heads

again and again as much as to say, "Yes, how could they ?"

LITTLE MARAK'S CLOTHES

A little girl baby had come to the round snow igloo that Kodlu and his father had made, and she didn't have a stitch of clothing. To be sure she didn't really need it yet, for she slept day and night in her mother's fur hood, tied up so tight that not a breath of cold air could touch her round little body. If the family went on a journey, baby Marak was placed under hood and jacket and all, right next to her mother's warm shoulders. She did nothing but sleep and eat, and was as happy as any baby could be.

But Baby Marak was growing, and the time was coming when she would demand to be let down from the bounds of the fur hood. Little Kodlu, who felt himself very big now that the baby had come, went up to his mother very seriously.

"Mother," he said, "The baby must have some clothes. I must go hunting and get some furs for you to make them of."

The mother may have thought that he was rather small to go hunting, but she did not say so.

"That will be very good, my son," she answered, smiling at him with the look in her eyes that mothers in every land have for their boys; and all night long on his bed of furs, little Kodlu dreamed of hunting and thought of what Baby Marak must have.

"She will need nannookies and a kapetah," he said to himself. Nannookies are fur trousers sewed to fur shoes so that not one bit of cold can get through to the little limbs. A kapetah is a fur jacket shaped something like our sweaters with a fur hood to fasten around the head.

"They will be very nice and soft if they are made of sealskin," thought little Kodlu. "I will ask my father to let me go seal-hunting tomorrow."

His father laughed as he looked down at the little round fat boy with his black eyes so eager, but he did not laugh at him but with him—which is quite a different thing.

"I will go with you, my son," he said, and early the next morning they started.

You wouldn't have known that it was morning. The only light was the light of the stars, for it was the winter season when the sun does not rise at all. They plodded

along over the icy hummocks in the dim light that the stars and the snow gave, and shivered, for it was away below zero and even double boots, coats, hoods, trousers and mittens of the thickest fur could not keep out all the cold. But Kodlu forgot all about cold when the dog who ran along beside them began snuffing and whining softly and acting very different from the way he usually did.

"He scents a seal," said Kodlu's father. "Dogs can tell where the seals are much quicker than we can. If he were an untrained dog, he would bark and frighten the seal away, but he knows enough not to make the least noise near it. There is certainly a seal hole near."

In a little while Kodlu and his father came up to the seal hole. "It is a little snow igloo," said Kodlu, and indeed it was just the shape of their snow house. But the seal had made it. It was his breathing place. The seal swims under water like a fish, but he cannot live under it long at a time. He must come up to the top of the water about every half hour and breathe. So he makes a breathing hole in the ice and protects it from the cold with the little dome of snow. The Eskimo hunters wait beside the breathing holes until the seals come, and then

spear them with their harpoons and drag them out on the ice.

But each seal has a good many breathing holes and sometimes he will not come to any particular one for more than twenty-four hours. Kodlu and his father waited and waited and waited.

It was very cold. Their breath went up from their noses like thick clouds of smoke. Their hands and feet tingled. Their faces smarted. They grew hungry too, for they had been gone for hours.

Kodlu thought of the warm igloo with heaps of soft skins to lie on and strips of blubber to chew at any time, and he almost wished he were little like Marak to be taken care of instead of doing a man's work and providing for the others. He would really have liked to run back to the igloo and mother as fast as his fur-clad legs would carry him. But he set his square little shoulders and made his teeth stop chattering.

"I mustn't give up," he said to himself. "I must stay here till I catch a seal if I freeze solid and the snow drifts all over me."

Just at noon when the sky was almost bright he heard a funny snuffing noise at the hole.

"A seal!" he cried; and his fur-mittened hands fairly shook with excitement. But they did not shake so much that he could not thrust the point of his sharp spear through the blow-hole with all his force. It caught the seal firmly with its barbs, and slowly and carefully, breaking the ice to make room, little Kodlu and his father drew it up.

It was a fine fat seal and would furnish them food and blubber and oil for their lamps for a long time beside the warm, furry skin for Marak's little garments.

How proud Kodlu was of that skin and how anxious that it should be prepared just right. His mother smiled again to see how carefully he watched her dry it and stretch it and pound it and scrape it and chew it up, bit by bit, until it should be just as soft as a skin could be. Then she cut it out with the knife that they used for everything. Not one of the family had ever seen a pair of shears. She cut the little nannookies and kapetah Eskimo fashion, pushing the knife away from her, and then she sewed them with a needle made from a bit of walrus tusk and sinews of the reindeer for thread.

It took weeks to make it ready; but they were all done by the time that little Marak

was big enough to trot around. And every time that Kodlu looked at her he was very proud indeed.

ESKIMO GIRL

ESKIMO BOY

VISITORS IN ESKIMO LAND

"A white man is coming! A white man is coming!"

Ten year old Ahwanak fairly danced up and down in his joy. He looked very much like a bouncing ball of fur, but no ball ever bounded so gleefully. He was just as glad as he could be; and perhaps that was because his father was so glad. Visitors were always welcome in the lonely northland; but to have a white visitor was something wonderful.

They had seen the dog sledge coming miles away across the treeless plains, and Ovayuak had run out to meet and welcome them Eskimo fashion. Now he ran back faster than he had gone out to tell the women to put on a great kettle of fish-heads to boil for the white man who was coming was very hungry.

All of the household who did not have to cook, dogs and all, went out half a mile to meet and welcome the visitors. And this was Eskimo fashion too. Whoever came to Ovayuak's door was welcomed as a beloved brother might be. He was given food and shelter freely as long as he cared to stay. If his clothing was worn thin, Ovayuak's women would make him more.

No one was ever turned away. No one ever received an unfriendly word. Whatever Ovayuak had, he shared freely with every one who came. There was no fear of any one's being hungry or cold or without shelter in an Eskimo village—unless all were hungry and cold, and the last house was blown down. Everything they had was divided.

This white man had been sent out by the government to learn about the Eskimos. He expected a ship with supplies to come to him at the mouth of the Mackenzie river but the ship was wrecked and never came.

The white man was poorer just then than the poorest Eskimo. He had nothing that he could pay them for what they gave to him. But they never thought of pay. They received him and treated him as kindly as though he had been for years a dear friend; and a very great friend of theirs he became in a little while.

One day he tried in broken Eskimo to thank Ovayuak for his kindness. The Eskimo was far more surprised than pleased. "Do then, in the white man's land, some starve and shiver while others eat much and are warmly clad?" he asked. And the white man was ashamed to say yes.

Indeed, said Ovayuak, he was glad to see

any guest and especially a white guest. He was glad the white man had come. He hoped he would stay long in his house. He wanted his little boy to learn to write "tea," "sugar," "powder" and other words upon paper so that he could send letters to the whaling ships and get what he wanted.

Little Ahwanak, who had danced up and down with delight when he heard that the white man was coming, was still more happy when the white man had come, only more quiet because he was shy. How he ran to get the trough for his mother to take up the boiled fish-heads on. How happy he was when the white man took them and ate them and called them good. Most white men do not think fish-heads boiled without any salt are good. This white man hadn't thought so once.

But now he was very very hungry and they tasted very good indeed. The Eskimos were as happy as they could be to think that they had been able to give him something that he liked. They watched with great joy to see him eat, and they gave him a new name right away. It was "The-white-man-who-knows-that-fish-heads-are-good-to-eat."

All winter long the white man lived at Ovayuak's house. His white man's cloth-

ing was all worn out. Ovayuak brought forward his softest and best skins, and Ovayuak's two wives made the white man some Eskimo clothes—a double suit with fur next the skin and fur outside; and the white man thought he never had known what comfort in cold weather was before.

All day Ovayuak and his family fished.

"Why do you catch so many fish?" asked the white man. "You never sell them, and you have as many now as your household could eat in two years."

"Because some people always come hungry," answered Ovayuak. "We have plenty fish for ourselves, but who can tell if the people who have gone inland to get furs may not come back any day with empty sleds—or maybe no sleds at all, carrying their children on their backs because the dogs are dead of starvation. I must keep plenty food on hand to give all who come."

He said it as simply as if the visitors who might come were his own children instead of strangers who had not the slightest claim on him.

Many visitors came to Ovayuak's home that winter and every one was treated just as the white man had been. Only one did not make them all rejoice when they saw him coming. This was a man who was a

murderer and a thief who had killed the husband of one of the women in the house. But, though they were sorry to see him coming, they treated him just as well as they did the rest of their guests.

"Why do you do so if he is a bad man?" asked the white visitor and they answered very seriously.

"To kill him, that might be sensible for he is a bad man and may commit more crimes; but to treat him badly and make him miserable, what good would that do?" And one of the things they think is the worst is "To speak badly of others."

The Eskimos never wash their bodies. They wear their clothes without changing them till they drop off. They wash their dishes by licking them out. They live on raw, frozen fish, uncleaned, boiled fish-heads and other things that you would not like to touch. But can't they teach us a lesson in real kindness and goodness?

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE HATCHET

"They eat it, father! They chop it up as we chop up ice and eat the chunks. It is brown and sweet. Oh, but it is good!"

Guess what the little Eskimo boy was talking about. Molasses—frozen molasses! Some white men had sailed into Hudson Bay and were spending the winter there. They had made themselves snow houses such as the Eskimos do, because they make the warmest winter quarters, and they were waiting to go on with their explorations in the spring.

How the little Eskimo boys and men, and women too, crowded around them and watched them! How they talked over them among themselves. They thought everything they did was wonderful. And they were much surprised at the curious stores they had in the tent beside their snow house.

Barrels of flour were there. The Eskimos hardly knew how it was to be used. How could they, when their land is too cold to raise any grain. Perhaps they thought it was like the snow it looked like, and would melt away if they put it near the fire. The Eskimo boys were greatly interested in everything in the store-house but they thought the best thing was the barrel of molasses.

It was frozen as stiff as ever ice could be; and the ship's cook chopped out lumps of it with a hatchet and put them over the fire

to melt. Once he gave a lump to each boy and they thought it was delicious.

"What good things white men have to eat!" said Nooktal wistfully.

When the cook got through chopping the molasses, he laid the hatchet down on top of it, for it was as solid as a cake of ice. Next day when he went to get the hatchet again, it was gone.

Where could it be? Not a white man had taken it.

"Some of those little Eskimo boys that hang around here," said the cook wrathfully. "It's that Nooktal, I'll bet. I'll never let him in again. I'll go and tell his father and get the hatchet back. I'll go now—"

But the captain stopped him.

"Eskimos don't steal," he said. "You will do nothing of the kind. The hatchet must be mislaid."

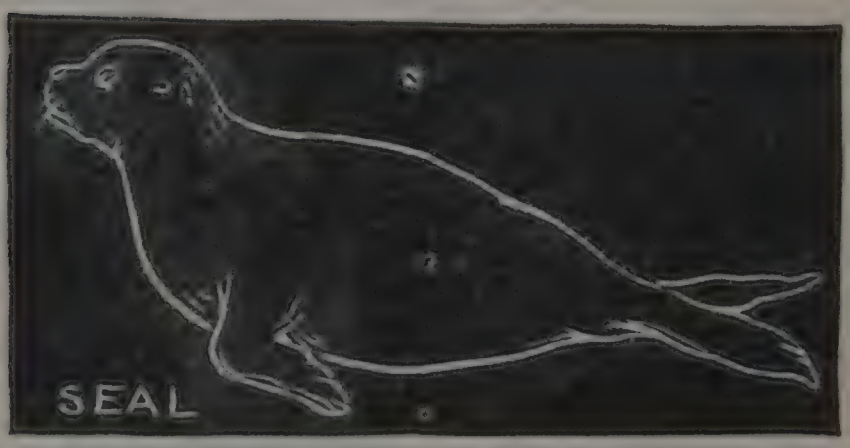
But the cook couldn't believe it. He was cross to every one of the little Eskimo boys and especially to Nooktal. He chipped up his molasses, now that the hatchet was gone, with an iron bar which he laid on top of the molasses as he had laid the hatchet.

But when he went to cut some more, the iron bar too was gone.

"I'll give that little Eskimo scamp a punishing he won't forget in a hurry," said the

cook, very mad indeed. But he wanted some molasses now. What should he cut it out with? He leaned over the barrel wondering. And, as he leaned over, he saw the end of the iron bar sticking out. The mass of molasses had looked and felt just like solid ice, but it was not like solid ice. Slowly it had parted and let first the hatchet and then the bar through to the bottom.

Oh, how ashamed the cook was when he found out this! He gave each one of the Eskimo boys a big chunk of frozen molasses —chopping it this time with an axe and not laying it down on the top of the barrel. And he gave little Nooktal two chunks. Nooktal was pleased; but he did not know why it was given to him. He did not dream that anybody could so much as think of his stealing anything.



AN ESKIMO KNIFE

"Take care, Tenolik! You will lose the knife!"

But the warning came too late. The little Eskimo boy had laid the knife down on the ice while he reached for another strip of walrus hide to cut up. The bushy foxtails that were sewed to the wrists of his fur jacket for added warmth about the hands, caught the knife and brushed it off into a deep crack in the ice.

It was hopelessly gone. That crack went down to the bottom of the ocean for all they knew. And it was the only knife Tewfik had.

Tenolik looked as dismayed as a boy could, and he had good reason to do so. To lose a knife was almost the most serious loss that could befall an Eskimo.

"Oh father, it is gone! How will we cut up strips for the dogs? How will we skin the seals you get? How will we cut up our meat? How will mother cut out clothing for us? How can we live at all without it?"

Tewfik was as much dismayed as little Tenolik, but Eskimos are very kind to their children and hardly ever punish or scold them.

"Never mind, my son," he said, although he knew that he minded very much indeed. "Our neighbor will lend me his knife and we will get along very well."

Why was it such a dreadful thing to lose a knife? Because there wasn't any possible way of buying another. There wasn't a store within hundreds of miles. The only way the Eskimos had of getting knives was making them for themselves out of any sharp material they could find.

It wasn't much use to think of making another—or rather of beginning to make one, in the winter. When light and summer came again, Tewfik would make a journey to the big brown stone with iron in it that had fallen from the sky, and from which all his tribes chipped off sharp bits to make themselves knives and arrowheads. (This was a meteorite. When Peary, the explorer, found it, it was half pounded away to make Eskimo knives.) There he would get something to make a knife-blade.

But Tewfik didn't have to go to the meteoric stone and didn't have to wait till summer. On the very first day of the twilight months, when the sun came above the horizon for just a little while each day, Tenolik and his great boy friend, Kaeluk, ran down to the sea-shore. It was hard making their

way over the ice-hummocks and a long distance to go; but Tenolik had an idea that he might find, drifted up on the shore by the pushing of the ice, something out of which Tewfik could make another knife. And his hopes were fulfilled. For they found something rusty and brown—something fastened to a bit of wood, which in itself was precious—something that had come from a wrecked ship that had started to discover the North Pole and been crushed in ice. It was a piece of iron. And iron, as both boys knew, will make knife-blades.

How they raced back through the darkness that came so quickly, falling, getting up again, minding nothing so that they did not lose their precious find! How happy Tewfik was when they gave it to him!

"Now I can make me another knife," he cried. "I will set to work immediately. Kaeluk's father has just finished his knife that he has been working at for so long. I I will ask him to lend me his tool."

The tool was a curious one, such as no one but an Eskimo could have had, for no one else would have had the patience to make it. It had once been a file and had also come off from the wrecked Franklin ship. The Eskimo, Kaeluk's father, had made it into a sort of cold-chisel by rubbing

its blunt edge against stones and rocks to sharpen it. It had taken him two years to do it, and twice as long to cut out his knife blade and fasten it to its horn handle. Six years of steady work on a single knife! Wouldn't you have felt discouraged to undertake it? But Tewfik went to work as cheerfully as if cutting out a knife blade from a rusty, irregular piece of old iron were the easiest task in the world.

First, he outlined the width of his knife-blade on the iron plate, and then went to cutting away at it with the hand-made cold-chisel. Day after day he worked at it—week after week—month after month. Day after day he squatted by the door in summer, and by the lamp in winter, working away at his knife. Day after day, week after week, month after month, without even a thought of grumbling at the time it would take.

He had worked at it a year and it wasn't half finished when the two boys came running up excitedly to the skin tent which had taken the place of the igloo of winter.

"Oh father! Father! A ship is coming! Not a whaling-boat. A big ship that breathes fire and smoke and spreads many wings," they cried.

It was the most wonderful event that had

ever happened in that far away northern region. The boys had never seen a real ship come in before—only parts of wrecked ones tossed up on the beach. And when some men with white faces and clothing of cloth, not fur, got off and made their way to them, the Eskimos thought wonders would never cease.

It was very strange to Tenolik and Tewfik and Keulak and the rest that these white men had just come to see what was in their country and to hunt for a strange thing they called the North Pole. Of what use would such a pole be after they had found it, the Eskimos asked. The account of what they did is another story; but I want to tell you about Tewfik's knife. The white men who saw him working on it, had wonder on their faces.

"Did you ever dream of such a thing before?" cried one with very bright eyes and the kind of a writing stick that white men call a pencil in his hand continually. "Did you ever dream before of any mortal's having the patience even to begin such a work? That half-made knife is worth any amount of money for our museum. Try to buy it of him, Jensen. Offer him any amount."

But all the gold and silver they could offer had no effect on Tewfik.

"What could I do with it?" he asked in Eskimo, pointing to the increasing pile of gold and silver. "I could not hunt with it nor cut up the game I had brought in nor skin it. I could not eat it or wear it. I do not want that. What I want is a knife such as I am making, and with it I can get food and clothing and all that I need."

"A knife! Good heavens! Offer to trade him a butcher knife for it!" So they did.

Would Tewfik make the trade? Why, you never saw a man so happy in your life as Tewfik was to get that butcher knife in exchange for his work of months! To his mind it was the biggest bargain that ever was made. He had expected to work at least two years more before he got his knife and here was one in his hand. And such a sharp knife! He touched the bright blade in amazement. It would have taken him months to sharpen his knife after he had made it.

And if Tewfik was the happiest man in Eskimo land certainly his son Tenolik was the happiest boy. He got out his queer Eskimo drum and pounded on it delightedly to a funny little Eskimo song made up out of his own head.

"Oh I am so happy, so happy!" sang Tenolik in delighted Eskimo gutterals.

"The white men have come and have given my father a knife.

No more will I sorrow because I dropped his knife into the ocean.

No more will we go hungry and cold because he has no knife to kill meat for us or to take off skins.

We shall have much meat in our storing place.

We shall have many fur robes in our igloo and be very warm.

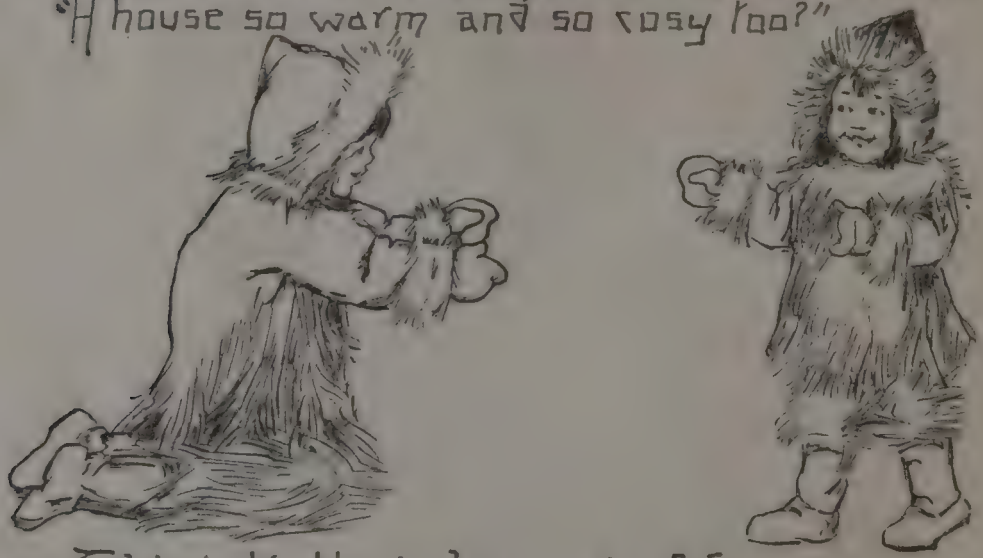
Never was there such good fortune before.

To get a knife—a sharp knife—with no labor of making it!

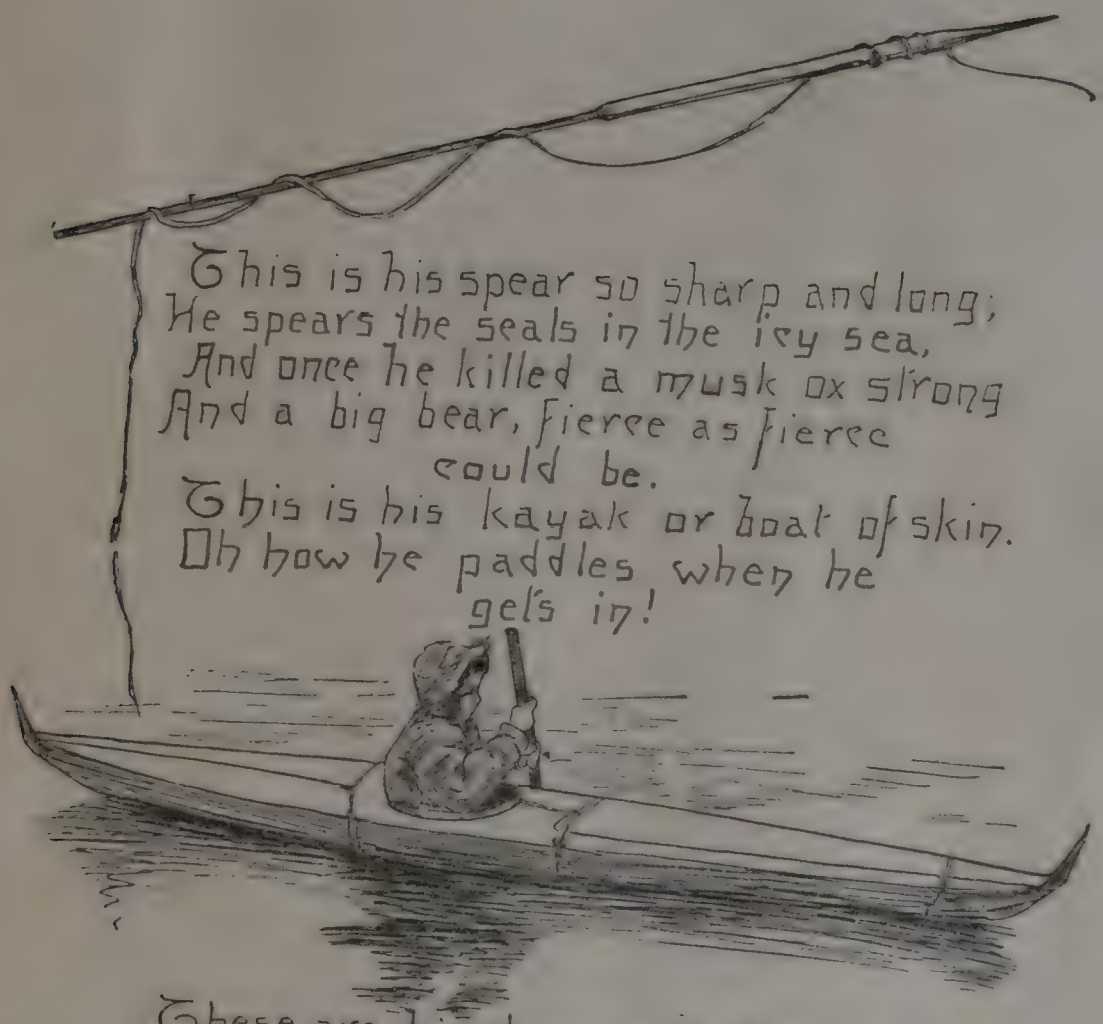
Oh I am so happy, so happy!"

A Rhyme Of An Esquimo Boy.

This is a snow-hut white and round;
The ceiling's low and the roof's a dome,
And not a window may there be found,
But Kadlu thinks it a lovely home.
"Where else can you find", says little Kadlu
"A house so warm and so cosy too?"

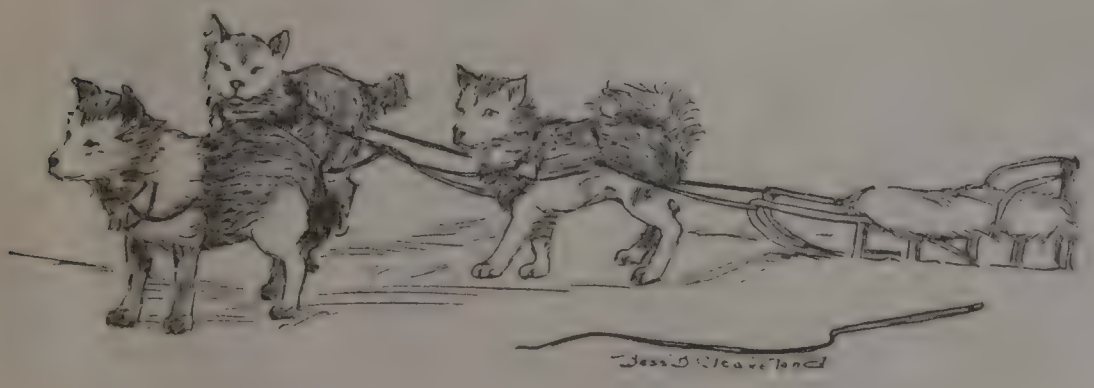


This is Kadlu in his suit of fur,
Trousers and boots and hood as well;
His sister has one just like it for her
And one from the other you'd scarcely tell,
For boys and girls in that snowy land
Dress just alike, you understand.



This is his spear so sharp and long;
He spears the seals in the icy sea,
And once he killed a musk ox strong
And a big bear, fierce as fierce
could be.
This is his kayak or boat of skin.
Oh how he paddles when he
gets in!

These are his dogs with shaggy coats;
This is the sledge where he takes his rides;
He cracks his whip and speeds along
And swift and glad o'er the snow he glides.
"There is never a land", says little Kodlu
"So fine as ours the whole world through."



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